



W.E.B. hosts the CWTRI-BTO Legionella Symposium at the Radisson Resort

This week Aruba welcomed a gathering of specialists that provide us with one of the most essential things of life, water. The Directors of W.E.B., the government organization that distills our potable water and produces Aruba's energy, conducted a three-day symposium from Wednesday through Friday aimed at educating attendees on the notorious "Legionnaires' Disease" bacteria.

Representatives from the islands of Curacao, Bonaire, San Martaan, Saba and St. Eustatius were invited to join the lectures and discussions that provided information by experts towards the prevention of the problem to all water company workers. According to Kelvin Augustin, Director of Communications for W.E.B., Aruba has never been plagued with Legionnaire's Disease, but all who work with water should always be vigilant at all times.

Legionnaire's Disease is an infectious disease characterized by high fever, dry cough, lung congestion, and subsequent pneumonia. The disease struck over 180 people attending an American Legion convention in Philadelphia in July 1976—hence the name. The causative bacterium, later identified as *Legionella pneumophila*, is inhaled via contaminated water droplets, primarily from air conditioning and ventilation systems. A milder form of the disease has also been identified. The disease is not passed from person to person, nor through drinking or washing in water that is contaminated with low numbers of bacteria. Legionnaires' disease is also associated with potting composts, though the route of transmission isn't confirmed, but could be by breathing in dusts or aerosols from the potting mix. *Legionella longbeachae* can survive on unwashed hands for half an hour, so people should wash their hands after potting plants and gardening. The disease doesn't affect everyone who comes into contact with the bacteria, but those most at risk are people whose immune systems are compromised in some way. For several days during the incubation period of the disease, you may feel tired and weak. The incubation period can be between 2 to 10 days after being exposed to the bacteria. Once diagnosed, there are antibiotics that are highly effective against the bacteria, especially if taken early enough. An antibiotic called erythromycin is often the first choice.

The growth of *Legionella pneumophila* tends to take place in water systems that remain stagnant. Prevention entails keeping water systems moving, and flushing systems that have remained stagnant such as in a domicile or resort that has been closed for some time. Before inhabiting these buildings, the water systems should be completely cleaned out first, as should the air conditioning systems.

Various experts in the field gave lectures during the symposium including Professor Dr. Ir. Dick van der Kooij of Kiwa Water Research, Netherlands, Drss. Bert Groen, Coordinator of "Legionella" for the Vroom Ministry, and Dhr. Ir. Alexander Vos de Wael. The symposium, which was conducted in Dutch, ended in a discussion panel offering their conclusions at defining the problem and preventing it.